

Parent Support = Student Success

Experts agree: Showing support at home for your youngster's education leads to success in school and a good attitude toward learning. Here are important ways you can motivate your child to do well.



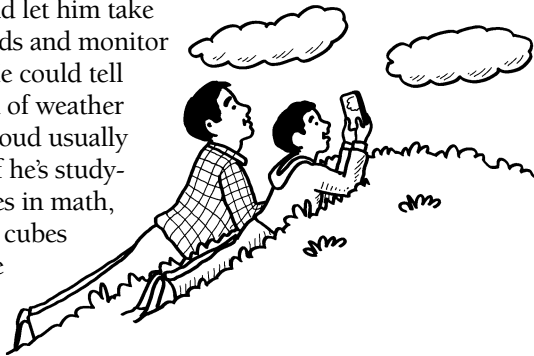
Talk about learning

Check backpacks

Taking an interest in what your youngster is learning at school shows him that you believe education is important. His backpack is full of clues. Go through it together, and look over papers and books he brings home. Focus on learning, while also keeping an eye on grades he's receiving. For example, ask him to read a poem he wrote or to explain how he solved a math problem. *Note:* Be sure to sign any required paperwork, and have him return it to his bag so he can hand it in on time.

Find real-world connections

Whether you're at home or out and about, look for activities that let your child make real-life connections to what he's studying in school. Say he's doing a weather unit in science. Go outside, and let him take photos of clouds and monitor the weather. He could tell you what kind of weather each type of cloud usually indicates. Or if he's studying solid shapes in math, see how many cubes and spheres he can spot on a walk.



Support homework

Be a resource

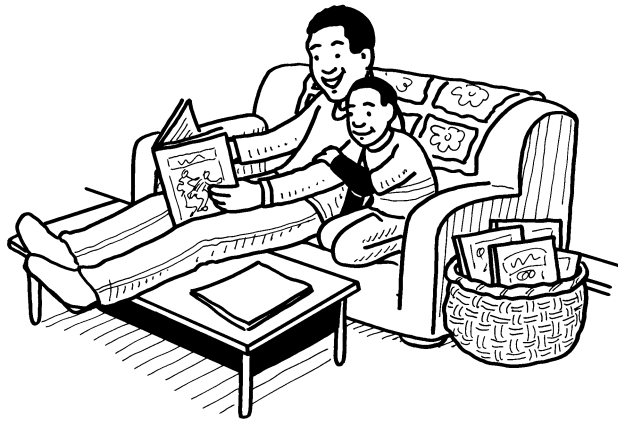
Ask your youngster to explain homework assignments to you. This will help her remember and focus on what to

do—plus, homework is a great springboard for discussions about school. If she gets stuck while she's working, ask questions to get her unstuck, rather than telling her the answers. Try: "Is there an example in your textbook that might give you a clue?" Also, check to make sure her homework is done each day, but don't correct it. Her teacher needs to see mistakes to find out what your child doesn't understand or where she needs extra help. Finally, when she studies for a test, offer to quiz her.

Set the stage

Show the entire family that homework is a priority. Together, find a spot away from distractions like the TV or siblings. It should have good lighting and be stocked with supplies (paper, pencils, calculator, dictionary). Then, let your youngster decorate a sign that says "Homework in progress. Talk to you later!" to post when she's working. *Tip:* Make sure electronic devices are silenced or in another room. If your child uses a device for homework, she should close unrelated windows and apps.





Create routines

Read aloud daily

Reading aloud to your youngster for at least 20 minutes every day is one of the most important keys to his success. Many parents read bedtime stories, but you could also read a wake-up story in the morning, hold a family read-aloud after dinner, and carry books in the car to read on the go. Choose a variety of reading materials, including fiction, nonfiction, children's magazines, and poetry.

Plan a healthy lifestyle

Routines that keep your child healthy also support academic achievement. If he is well rested, he'll be more likely to arrive at school ready to learn, so make sure he gets 9–11 hours of sleep. And good nutrition will give him the energy he needs to focus in class. Have him start each day with a healthy breakfast at home or in school. Regular physical activity—at least an hour a day—promotes good health, too. Take family bike rides, shoot baskets together at a playground, and set an example by regularly exercising yourself.

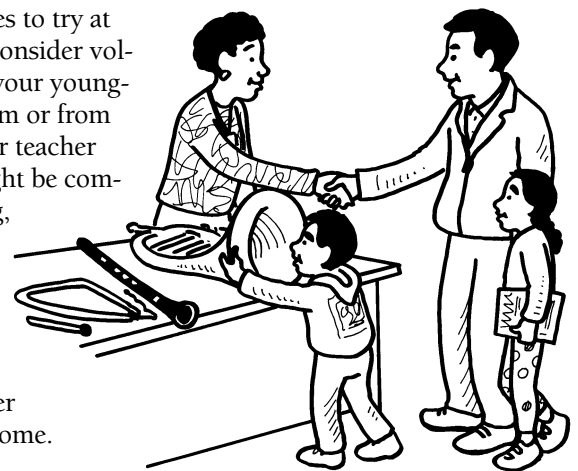
Communicate with the school

Stay in contact

Parent-teacher conferences allow you to sit down one-on-one with the teacher and talk about how to support your child's education. You can stay in touch between conferences, too, by sending notes or emails. If you have a concern about your youngster, ask for a time to meet or talk on the phone. *Tip:* It's nice to contact the teacher when things are going well, too. Sending a note about a classroom activity your child enjoyed or a positive comment she made about school is a good way to maintain a strong relationship.

Participate in events

Attend literacy nights, PTA or PTO meetings, math fairs, and special events to get to know school staff and learn information that can help you help your youngster. Introduce yourself to the media specialist, the school counselor, and the music teacher. Take notes about activities to try at home. Also, consider volunteering in your youngster's classroom or from home. Tell her teacher what you might be comfortable doing, such as reading one-on-one with students or making learning center materials at home.



The power of expectations

Children pick up on what parents expect from them—and they're likely to rise to the occasion. Try these suggestions for setting and communicating high, but reasonable, expectations for your youngster.

● **State your expectations.** You can be direct ("I expect you to finish homework before you get screen time") or indirect ("When you graduate from high school and go to college..."). Communicate your expectations regularly so your child knows them.

● **Be realistic.** Your youngster will be more apt to meet expectations if they're within her reach. Say several of her report



card grades dropped. It may be more reasonable to expect her to bring them up by one letter grade rather than two.

● **Make attendance a priority.** Let your child know that you expect her to attend school all day, every day, unless she's sick or there's a family emergency. Show her that you value attendance by scheduling vacations and, when possible, medical appointments outside of school hours.

Note: If you have more than one child, try to communicate high expectations suited to each of them.

Home & School CONNECTION®

Learning with Toys and Games

“Let’s play!”

Did you know that those two simple words can help your child do better in school? Power up your youngster’s playtime with these ideas for adding language, math, and science to the toys and games he already enjoys.



Toy vehicles

Road signs

When your child sets up imaginary highways, suggest that he include road signs and billboards. For inspiration, read real-life signs together and discuss the information they share (warnings, directions, attractions, names of cities). Your youngster can write his own signs on index cards—perhaps “Rest area, next right” or “Eat at Joe’s Cafe. Best food in town!”



Let him tape them to toilet paper–tube “posts” so they will stand up as his cars zip around.

Free parking

These pretend parking lots will encourage your child to sort, group, count, and compare. Suggest that she think of ways to sort her vehicles (by type, color, number of doors) and count each group. Then, she can create parking lots on separate sheets of paper and draw matching numbers of spaces for each group. *Idea:* Have her explore different numbering systems by making more lots. In one, she might start at 100 and count on (101, 102, 103). Another lot could feature even-numbered spaces on one side and odd on the other. Now it’s time to park her cars and trucks where they belong!

Construction ahead

Building tunnels and bridges is a creative way for your youngster to dabble in engineering. Let him get duct tape and recycling-bin items (boxes, tubes, cups). Then, have him sketch a design and label the materials he will use. He can build a model and test it by rolling cars and trucks across or

through. To solve any problems (say, the bridge collapsed), encourage him to redesign and test again. He’ll learn all about the engineering process: design, build, test, redesign.

Toy figures, dolls, stuffed animals

A-Z compliments

Boost your child’s vocabulary with this descriptive game. Have her pick an action figure or a doll, choose an adjective beginning with A, and compliment the toy: “This superhero is amazing.” She’ll pass the toy to the next person, who adds a “B” compliment: “This superhero is amazing and brave.” The next player continues with C, and so on. The last player able to add an adjective picks a new toy to describe and starts another round with the next letter of the alphabet. If the last round ended on F, for instance, she begins with G.



Longer or shorter

Select any toy figure, and ask your youngster to point to another one that he thinks is longer (or shorter). After he picks, help him line up the two items side by side to check. If he’s correct, he “captures” both and sets them beside him. Otherwise, they go back in the toy box. Swap roles, and let him give you a size challenge. Whoever captures the most after five rounds wins. *Variation:* Name a length (say, 3 inches), and have him choose a toy figure he thinks is longer or shorter.

Home sweet home

Together, explore animal habitats in library books or online. Then, ask your child to find toy animals that would share a habitat in the real world. She might get a stuffed monkey and a stuffed leopard and say, “They both live in the jungle.” Let her create a habitat for them using household materials. She could construct a jungle with trees made of paper towel tubes painted green and add vines of yarn, for instance. What else would the animals need? (food, a source of water)

Games

Word spill

Cover the faces of six dice with pieces of masking tape. Write a letter from A to Z on each side, adding an extra D, L, R, S, T, A, E, I, O, and U. Set a timer for 1 minute. Your youngster rolls the dice, and everyone writes words that include at least three of the letters rolled. For T-Y-E-F-X-T, he may write *textile* because it includes T-E-X-T from the dice. When time is up, compare lists, and cross off duplicates. The winner is the person with the most words that no one else wrote.

Play 10 rounds.



Two-player baseball

For this game, each player needs a shuffled deck of cards (face cards removed, ace = 1). Let your child be the batter. Flip over your top cards, and she adds the two numbers together (older children could multiply). An even sum is a hit, and an odd sum is a strike. Three strikes is an out, and four hits is a run. Keep track of your hits, runs, strikes, and outs with paper and pencil. After three outs, shuffle the cards and swap roles to complete the inning. Score the most runs to win.

How the ball rolls

Try this wacky bowling game to experiment with force and motion. Use 10 empty water bottles for the pins and an assortment



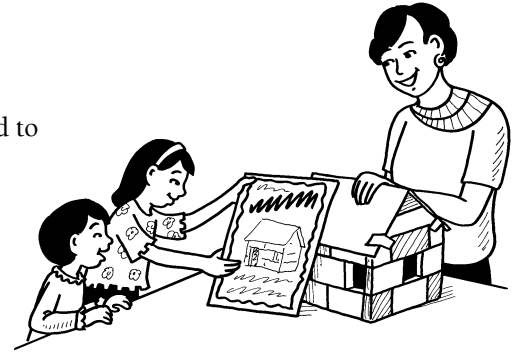
of balls (football, Wiffle ball, soccer ball). Bowl as usual—except use a different ball for each frame. Have your youngster compare how the size, shape, and weight of the balls affect the outcome. He might notice that round balls roll the best or that heavier balls knock down more pins than lighter ones. Each pin knocked down = 1 point. High score after 10 frames wins.

Blocks

House for sale

Ask your child to build a dream house out of blocks. Now she needs to write a persuasive ad to sell it!

Remind her to make the home sound tempting—and to think about her audience (the buyer)—as she creates her sales pitch. To appeal to parents with several children, she may write, “A large family will have room to spread out in this *expansive* home.” *Tip:* Suggest that she read real estate ads for ideas.



Geometry quilts

Let your child examine quilts or pictures of quilts for repeating patterns. He might notice how triangles form pinwheels or see squares and triangles arranged into stars. Encourage him to invent his own pattern using wooden or foam blocks. For instance, he could make a race car pattern from a triangle, a rectangle, and four circles. Then, have your youngster draw the pattern on separate sheets of paper and tape them into a cool quilt to display on a wall.

Tower challenge

What is the tallest tower your youngster can make with 10 blocks? Encourage her to problem solve and measure heights with this activity. Have her choose 10 blocks, construct a tower, and measure it with a ruler or tape measure. Next, ask her to look at the blocks she used and exchange two of them for ones that could make her tower taller—without toppling over. Which shapes or sizes would make good swaps? After measuring her new creation, let her swap out another pair of blocks and try again.

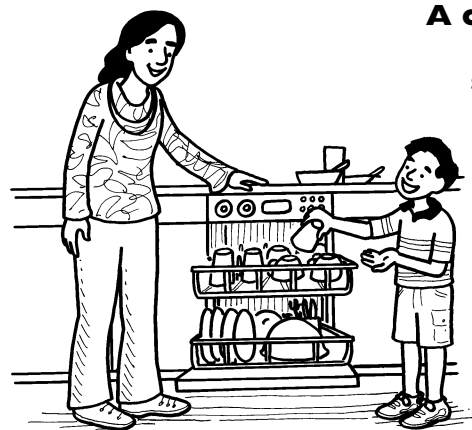
Responsibility Rocks!

Children learn letters, numbers, shapes, and more in hands-on ways. Why not learn responsibility that way, too? From doing chores to keeping promises and owning up to mistakes, here are ways your youngster can become more responsible at home and in school.



Portrait of responsibility

Suggest that your child draw a self-portrait and label parts with her responsibilities. She could write “Listening to my teacher” beside an ear and “Walking my little brother to school safely” near her feet. Draw one of your own, and let her compare the two—she’ll see that you each have different responsibilities.



A chore expert

Give your youngster regular household chores—and allow him to take the lead. Feeling like an expert can motivate him to get the job done and take pride in his work. For instance, he could come

up with a better way to load the dishwasher and then teach everyone his method. Or he might think of a new system for sorting laundry. *Idea:* When you ask about his day at school, have him tell you about classroom jobs he does, like passing out papers or being the line leader.

Responsible for learning

Being a student is your child’s job—and she’s the one in charge of that job! Encourage her to come up with a good system for remembering her responsibilities, such as using a planner or keeping a checklist on her desk. Tasks could include writing down homework assignments, completing assigned reading, studying for tests, being prepared for class discussions, and turning in finished work.

Taking care of property

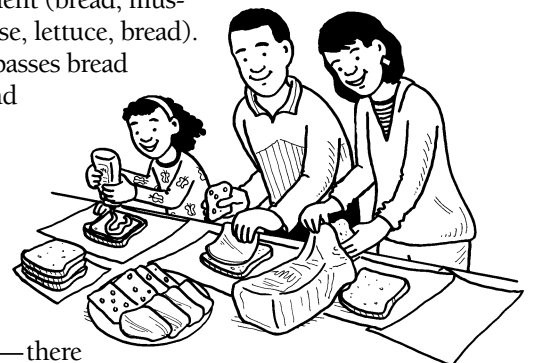
Let your youngster post signs around the house encouraging family members to be responsible for shared property. He could write and illustrate each one. A sign near art supplies might read “Put caps back on markers and glue sticks so they don’t dry out.” And a sign in the bathroom may say “Wipe up spilled water so no one slips.”

Tip: If you take on an extra responsibility (feeding a vacationing neighbor’s cats, babysitting your cousin’s toddler), invite your youngster to help you so he gets a taste of new responsibilities.

Assembly-line fun

In factories, each assembly-line worker depends on everyone before her to do her own part of the job. Show your youngster how this works by trying out an assembly line at home. You might make sandwiches for a picnic. Assign each person an ingredient (bread, mustard, turkey, cheese, lettuce, bread).

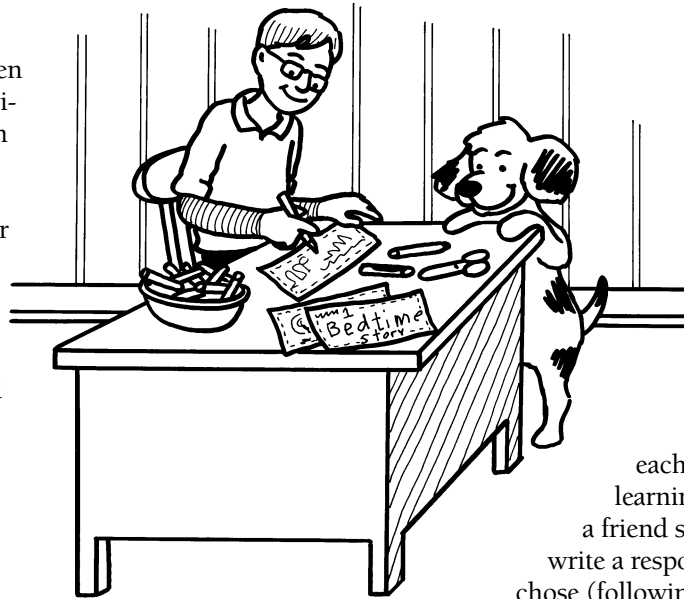
The first person passes bread down the line, and everyone adds their ingredients in order. Ask your child what would happen if the person in charge of bread didn’t do her job—there would be no sandwiches!



continued

“I promise” coupons

Explain to your child that when he makes a promise, he’s responsible for keeping it. Encourage him to be a promise keeper with this idea. Let him design coupons promising to do special things for family members. A coupon for his little sister might say “I promise to read you a bedtime story this weekend,” and one for you could read “I promise to clean out the back of the van before our trip.”



Tip: When possible, use words like *capable* and *dependable* while talking to or about your child. You could say, “I can always depend on you to...” or “Julie is very capable of...”

Financially savvy

Learning to spend and save responsibly begins early. Your youngster will need to weigh needs and wants, set priorities, and be patient. If you give her an allowance, or if she receives money for gifts or odd jobs, suggest that she set aside a portion to save. *Idea:* Take a field trip to the bank to open her own savings account.

A dose of accountability

Everyone makes mistakes, but it’s important to take responsibility for them. If your child does something he’s not supposed to, ask how he will be accountable for his actions. Say he misses the bus and you have to drive him to school. Perhaps he can do a chore that you normally do to make up for the time you spent driving. Or if he doesn’t finish his work in class, he may need to complete it at home instead of playing with friends.

Earning privileges

With privileges come responsibilities. This game shows your youngster how they’re related. Get a dozen index cards, and give half to her. Ask her to write a privilege she enjoys on



each card, such as deciding which learning centers to use in class or having a friend sleep over. On each of your cards, write a responsibility to match a privilege she chose (following classroom rules, going to bed on time). Put the cards facedown in rows, and take turns flipping over two cards and reading them. If the privilege matches the responsibility, keep the pair. If not, return them to their spots. Collect the most matches to win.

Our earth is for everyone

Your child isn’t too young to start taking responsibility for the planet! Encourage him to make an events calendar of earth-friendly activities. He might pencil in an Earth Day celebration that he read about on a flyer. Or he could plan a household “energy checkup” where family members brainstorm ways to use less power. He’ll feel proud to check off each item that he accomplishes.



Responsible on the Internet

Kids in today’s world must learn to behave responsibly online. Consider creating a contract with your child that outlines responsible online behavior. Include guidelines like telling you about any inappropriate messages or posts she receives, keeping personal information private (name, age, school), and visiting only websites you have approved. You should both sign the contract, and hang it by the computer.